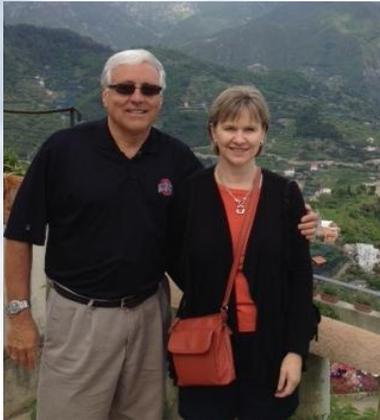


# INSPIRING HOPE

*Jeff Davidson - "I've been blessed with a treatable disease."*

**I was born with mild aortic stenosis and a bicuspid aortic valve.** My congenital defect (CHD) was first diagnosed at age 9 (in 1960) at St. Louis Children's Hospital and I'm fortunate that my first open-heart surgery to replace that valve wasn't needed until age 42 (in 1993) because of vast improvements in heart disease research since 1960!!

But growing up with mild aortic stenosis was frustrating for a boy who liked sports. Not allowed to play football, I settled for basketball and running long distance. I abused my body playing all kinds of sports, running marathons and 5K/10K races. Running on a hot, 80 degree summer day was an incredible "feel good" for me.



**(Jeff and Helen on Amalfi Coast, Italy - May 2012)**

Running the streets of downtown Cleveland at lunch 3-days a week with coworkers was also a great stress buster!! All good things, however, come to an end. A series of heart events, starting in late 1991, changed my life but ultimately gave me a better perspective on life.

First, in December of 1991, **my father died of congestive heart failure at age 61.** His first heart attack was a massive one at 38, but he lived with CHF for 23 more years. My Dad was my life!! Then, in January 1993 (at 42) I was 5 miles into a run in Washington D.C. when I experienced chest pains. What was this? Running

6-7 minute miles was not a problem previously (yes, I denied my heart disease for too many years....stupid!!).

Returning to Columbus for tests, it was determined my aortic valve was 90% blocked (calcified). Dr. Charles Bush said: *"I don't want you even climbing stairs, let alone running"*. In March 1993, I underwent open-heart surgery and received a St. Jude mechanical aortic valve, and then discovered the challenges of living on Coumadin. Still, I wasn't feeling my mortality and resumed running, except my valve/heart rate didn't allow me to crank off 7-minute miles any longer (running 9 minute miles was like kissing your grandmother).

The turning point for me? An unexpected ascending aortic aneurysm discovered about 5 years later (think John Ritter) and, after watching the aneurysm grow for a few years, I underwent a more traumatic and serious aneurysm repair in March, 2003. I was told an aneurysm sometimes develops with a bicuspid aortic valve.

To end my **"Heart Success Story"**, I must admit I've experienced some depression and my desire to stay fit diminished. For a couple of years, I quit running, working out, and playing basketball... and gained 30 pounds!! Today, I've lost the 30 pounds and feel great! I'm playing basketball and working out 3-4 days a week. What changed? Two things: First - delivering Meals-On-Wheels (12 years now) forced me to focus on others instead of myself, and Second - Mended Hearts. Members of *"Mended Hearts of Central Ohio"* have inspired me and made me realize **"I've been blessed with a treatable condition"** and can have a great quality of life after heart surgery.

*If you've had a similar experience, or would just like to talk to Jeff about living with heart disease, his contact information is listed below!*

**Mended Hearts of Central Ohio**

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*It is great to be alive - and to help others*